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ABSTRACT

The Families in Education Program of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has existed since 1987 to increase awareness of the need for schools to involve parents as true partners in the education of children. This 1997 parents' guide presents ways that parents and families of both younger children and high school students can become involved in their children's academic success. Articles from this issue have information on the following topics: what parents want from schools and ways to keep parents informed; action team leadership; creating joint ownership in the future (parents' role in making school budget decisions); a school enhancement team; how to assure healthy communities and healthy youth; family and community town suppers; volunteering; father participation in school learning; paired reading; ways to help with summer reading; and a description of how Wisconsin libraries make communities into learning places, focusing on seven Wisconsin libraries. Also included are a parent interview form on best school practices; a community health checklist illustrating the need for a community to provide a healthy environment; 16 questions to encourage critical thinking in young readers; and a survey of parents on volunteering. (WJC)

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Learning Together
Spring 1997

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Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Madison, Wisconsin

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Foreword

Margaret Mead was right when she said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." The DPI Family-Community-School Partnership effort operates on that premise, and we are pleased to report that partnership efforts *are* "changing the world" for families and children in many districts statewide. This *Learning Together* packet tells how it's happening in some districts and offers ideas for furthering partnerships.

In Superior, for example, the Pattison Elementary School budget is very different than it might have been because parents and family members had a voice in shaping it. In McFarland, the community decided to build a youth center after students, families, school staff, and community members convened a Family and Community Town Supper to address complaints about young people not having enough to do. And in Whitewater, businesses support school volunteerism by sponsoring partnership coordinators at each building and by allowing employees to take work time to volunteer with students.

In each community the "small group of thoughtful, committed citizens" has been the impetus for improving opportunities for children. But how can we embrace on a continuous, long-term basis the potential for families and community members to carve out school programs that meet their needs and advance their children's learning? How can we assimilate responsive, effective partnership efforts into the infrastructure of school operations?

That's the real challenge. The DPI has long encouraged schools to look beyond their walls by using the framework for participation, a tool to help schools examine how they assist families with parenting skills, two-way communications, learning at home, volunteering, decisionmaking and collaborating with community. The article, *The Basics of Action Team Leadership*, in this packet contains practical help for making family-community-school partnerships enduring and endearing.

This department is also working with 17 Wisconsin school teams to examine the impact that a paid partnership coordinator can have on school building efforts. We offer an annual Partnership Workshop in the summer that all school districts are invited to send teams to. And our Family-Community-School Partnership staff, Jane Grinde and Ruth Anne Landsverk, are always available to answer questions or provide you with materials.

I hope you find our partnership services and resources useful. And, please, let us know how we can help you!

John T. Benson
State Superintendent

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What Parents Want from Schools

Members of State Superintendent John Benson's Parent Advisory Council informally surveyed parents in their respective communities about what Wisconsin parents want from their children's schools. Questions and responses were compiled according to the six types of family-community partnerships with the schools: parenting and family skills, communicating, learning at home, volunteering, decisionmaking, and community outreach.

Here are some of the ways parents said they wanted schools to help keep them informed about and participating in their children's learning.

1. Parenting and Family Skills

"How do you want your child's school to help strengthen or support your parenting and family skills?"

I want my child's school to:

- value parents as the first and most important educators of their children.
- give me more specific information about what my child needs to learn. Letter grades don't tell me what skills to practice at home and how to master the skill.
- support my ideas, beliefs, and morals, as a parent, about what my child needs to learn. For example, that discipline exists at home and in school, and that both places will help him and will expect him to succeed.
- develop a partnership plan for how I can help him learn, including giving me information about parent-student responsibilities, child development, and self-esteem.
- keep me informed about resources offered at school and in the community: the school family center, parent-teacher organization, and parenting workshops.

2. Communicating

"How do you want your child's teachers and school administrators to communicate with you and enable you to communicate back to them?"

I want my child's school staff to:

- value me as a member of my child's learning team and welcome my comments and ideas at any time on any subject.
- be ready to listen to me instead of only telling me what to do.
- build a climate of honesty and respect by returning my phone calls in a timely way and letting me know quickly about any problems or challenges.
- give me *many* opportunities to find out what my child is learning, how I can contribute, and what my ideas are by: publishing a clip-out section for parents' comments in every school newsletter, sending home completed assignments or weekly folders, publishing school policies and procedures, randomly surveying parents by phone to ask how well the school is doing, and publishing the phone numbers of teachers and when they are available to take my calls.
- if I am a parent who does not speak or read English well, send home tape-recorded books and messages so I can read with my child and feel a part of her learning.

3. Learning at Home

"How do you, as a parent, want your child's teachers and school staff to work with you in developing learning goals, offering at-home learning opportunities, and cultivating a learning-friendly environment at home for your child?"

I want my child's school staff to:

- have a family center in the school building.
- let me know frequently what my child is learning so I can talk about it and supplement it at home.
- help my child and me set learning goals at the beginning of the year and periodically review how those goals are being met as the school year progresses.
- send home ideas, activities, or interactive homework that allows me to strengthen my child's interests and abilities.
- ask me for my ideas about how my child learns. I have a lot to offer!
- provide guidelines about the teacher's expectation for my child's homework and how the family can contribute to meeting those expectations.

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4. Volunteering

"How do you want your child's school staff to invite you in and make it possible for you to volunteer in school, at school activities, or at home to support the school?"

I want my child's school staff to:

- help me feel welcome in the school building and classroom instead of acting as if they don't want me there.
- give me many opportunities to volunteer at home, at school, and at different times of the day so I am able to contribute somehow.
- use me! I have indicated that I'm willing to help, but no one has called me.
- train me. I'd really like to volunteer in a mentoring role with children but need a few guidelines.
- appreciate me. I try to let my child's teacher know how fortunate we feel to have her, and I'd sure like to feel the same.

5. Decisionmaking

"How do you want your school board and school staff to involve you and other parents as partners in policy decisions so that families' opinions are represented and families can participate in decisionmaking about school programs?"

I want my school board and school staff to:

- ensure that parents have a voice at all levels and on all school committees.
- allow parents to help shape the discussion from the ground up about upcoming programs and activities instead of waiting until a program or event is ready to go until you involve me.
- make sure that parents feel welcome to attend and speak at every school board meeting.
- conduct more telephone surveys of parents instead of written surveys. It means more to speak to a person.
- make it possible for working parents, single parents, grandparents, and parents who don't speak English well to participate in decisionmaking.

6. Community Outreach

"How do you, as a parent, want your child's school staff to establish partnerships with people and organizations in the community, as well as connect you to community resources?"

I want my child's school staff to:

- have several places, events, or ways to share information about community resources. Many parents don't know that it exists or how to access it.
- open use of the school building to all citizens and expand community education opportunities.
- be sensitive to families' needs. Many of the families asked to contribute to the school food drive will be the same families benefitting from the collection.
- involve families and community groups in helping the school address some of its challenges. We have ideas, resources, and helping hands!
- work together with the parochial schools and stress the importance of community.

7. Are there any other comments you would like to make about how your child's school can best involve you, as a parent, in your child's learning?

- recognize that educational success results from continual efforts to welcome and involve families and community members at all levels. Education is everyone's responsibility!
- our district does a good job of involving parents in preschool through elementary, but after that, very little effort is made to continue the parent connection with our children's education.
- I must feel as if my opinion matters and that my help is valuable. This will build parental and community support for education.
- direct parental involvement in the curriculum and in policy development will not only improve community support for education but will also improve education.

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Parent Interview on Best School Practices

Date of Interview_____

Introduction The purpose of this interview is to help determine what parents want from schools to help them keep informed about and involved in their children's learning. We'd like to hear what parents' top two or three concerns are in each of the following areas of family-school partnerships. Thank you!

1. Parenting and Family Skills

How do you want your child's school to help strengthen or support your parenting and family skills?
I want my child's school to:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. Communicating

How do you want your child's teachers and school administrators to communicate with you and enable you to communicate back to them?
I want my child's school staff to:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Learning at Home

How do you, as a parent, want your child's teachers and school staff to work with you in developing learning goals, offering at-home learning opportunities, and cultivating a learning-friendly environment at home for your child?
I want my child's school staff to:

_____
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4. Volunteering

How do you want your child's school staff to invite you in and make it possible for you to volunteer in school, at school activities, or at home to support the school?
I want my child's school staff to:

_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Decisionmaking

How do you want your school board and school staff to involve you and other parents as partners in policy decisions so that families' opinions are represented and families can participate in decisionmaking about school programs?
I want my school board and school staff to:

_____
_____
_____
_____

6. Community Outreach

How do you, as a parent, want your child's school staff to establish partnerships with people and organizations in the community, as well as connect you to community resources?
I want my child's school staff to:

_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Are there any other comments you would like to make about how your child's school can best involve you, as a parent, in your child's learning?

_____
_____
_____

What grades are your children in?

Birth to age 4 Kindergarten 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

I am (check all that apply):
❑ working parent ❑ single parent ❑ grandparent or other relative ❑ guardian
❑ parent of a child receiving special education services ❑ student

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The Basics of Action Team Leadership

One of the best ways to make sure that your family-community-school partnerships address real needs in ways that make a difference to children and families is to form an action team.

The Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships can be the "action arm" of a school council if one exists. The action team takes responsibility for assessing present practices, organizing options for new partnerships, implementing selected activities, evaluating next steps, and continuing to improve and coordinate practices for all types of involvement.

Although the members of the action team lead these activities, they are assisted by other teachers, parents, students, administrators, and community members. Here are some basics on starting and nurturing a child-centered action team:

Why create an Action Team?

The job of building a comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnership is too big for any one person to do alone. Most schools already have some kind of a committee to coordinate social activities. Similarly, a team of teachers, parents, administrators and others is needed to serve as the nucleus for planning, implementing, and evaluating the school-family-community partnership program. This group is the Action Team for School, Family, and Community Partnerships. It works to ensure that the six types of involvement (see schoolhouse framework, p. 7) are implemented in ways that help school reach goals for students, improve the school climate, and engage families in their children's education. Rather than creating a new committee, some schools may want to use their school improvement council, site council, or school enhancement team (see pp. 10-11).

Who are members of an Action Team?

An Action Team consists of *at least*:

- Three teachers from different grade levels.
- Three parents with children in different grade levels.
- One administrator.

Action Teams may also include at least:

- One member from the community at large.
- Two students from different grade levels (for middle and high schools).
- Others who are central to the school's work with families, including cafeteria worker, school social worker, counselor, or school psychologist.

Diverse membership ensures that partnership activities will take into account the various needs, interests, and talents of teachers, parents, the school, and students.

Who is the leader of an Action Team?

The leader of the action team may be any member who has the respect of the other members, as well as good communication skills and an understanding of the partnership approach. The leader or at least one member of the action team should also serve on the school council, school improvement team, or other such body if one exists.

What do members of an Action Team do?

In addition to group planning, members of the action team elect (or are assigned to act as) the chair or co-chair of one of six subcommittees for each type of involvement. A team with at least six members (and perhaps as many as 12) ensures that responsibilities for leadership can be delegated so one person is not overburdened and so the work of the action team will continue even if members move or change schools or positions. Members may serve renewable terms of two to three years, with replacement of any who leave in the interim. Other thoughtful variations in assignments and activities may be created by small or large schools using this process.

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What are the elements of planning and implementing?

Successful plans start with plans for success. Strong family, school, and community partnerships do not happen overnight, but they can be developed with good work over time. The first task for the action team is to identify the school's present strengths and weaknesses in each of the six types of involvement about which practices to keep, which to change, and which to add in order to create a comprehensive, balanced program of partnership and to achieve student-learning goals. As practices are implemented, the team should determine if and how the activities benefit students, parents, staff, and the school.

Excerpted from "School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share," by Joyce L. Epstein, Phi Delta Kappan, May 1995.

Framework for Participation

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Creating Joint Ownership in the Future

Parents Make School Budget Decisions

by Pat Lull, Parent Involvement Coordinator
Pattison Elementary School, Superior

Once upon a time, there was an elementary school called Pattison. It was a good elementary school, filled with wonderful teachers, bright students, and caring parents.

This school had been in the vanguard of those seeking to find new and better ways to educate its children. Still, despite several years of site-based management and experience in consolidated budget planning and engaging its children's families, Pattison's Site Council decided it really wanted to focus on a more meaningful level of parental involvement in deciding its 1996-97 budget. Research and experience pointed to children's increased levels of educational success when families developed true partnerships with the staff and administrators at their school.

Before mounting a massive effort to round up parents and family members, however, Site Council members decided to go in search of a vision. We decided to ask *The Big Question*: "What qualities, attributes, and abilities do our children need to succeed as citizens, parents, and workers in the 21st century?"

The emphasis then focused on the future of our children rather than what we needed to buy for the next year to keep the school running and the educational process going. We decided to convene focus groups to arrive at a community consensus about what our long-term vision for children should be (see sidebar on "Focus Group").

The focus groups decided that children should leave school with the ability to act responsibly, think critically, solve problems, do basic skills (reading, writing, arithmetic), be creative, and work as a member of a team.

In April 1996, the school invited all parents, staff, and focus group members to a meeting to translate the results of the focus group discussions into priorities for Pattison School, priorities that would bring about the greatest chance of improving children's learning and offer children the "qualities, attributes, and abilities" the Pattison community deemed important for citizens of the 21st century to possess.

At the April meeting, the Pattison community translated focus group results into these priorities for 1996-97: reducing class size, enhancing technology, increasing parent involvement, and improving opportunities for staff development.

Normally, the dollars-and-cents aspect of the school budget is addressed in the spring preceding each school year. This year, however, we simply ran out of time and had to wait until October 1996 to convene another community meeting and decide how unencumbered funds for that school year should be spent.

Participants at this meeting broke into small groups of 8 to 10 people and adjourned to separate areas. Each group was presented with the list of priorities and the actual dollars the school had to work with and charged with coming up with a budget and presenting it to the whole group by evening's end. The final budget was formulated from the budgets proposed by each small group.

Although some people certainly came with their own ideas about how the money should be spent, I don't believe anyone had any preconceived notions of what the final budget would look like by evening's end. There may have been individuals who left the meeting dissatisfied by some aspect of the final budget, but I believe everyone left with a sense of having been fully involved in the process, that the decision was reached by consensus, that the needs of children were addressed to the best of our ability with the funds available, and that the process was truly inspiring!

In essence, the community voted to use available dollars to relieve overcrowding in second-grade classrooms by hiring a third teacher. The community also voted to reduce the load of kindergarten teachers by assigning more teacher aide time to those classrooms. And the parent involvement coordinator's $2,500 stipend was refunded.

Had budgetary decisions been made by well-meaning committees or even one or two administrators, as

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The Focus Group Process

It's only natural to want to get right at the heart of budgeting: what do our children need, how much is it going to cost, and how much do we have to spend on it? But we also felt that there was much more at stake here. *The Big Question* really was: "What qualities, attributes, and abilities do our children need to succeed as citizens, parents, and workers in the 21st century?"

Through the focus groups—small groups of parents, teachers, and staff coming together—we tried to ensure that all parents and family members, staff, and community members in the Pattison area had a decisionmaking role in our budget process. Here's what we did:

1. The Pattison Site Council composed a brief note about the objectives of the focus group and sent it home to every family.
2. About 97 percent of parents participate in parent-teacher conferences. Volunteers stationed throughout the building on parent-teacher conference nights gave family members a brief rundown of the focus group process and asked parents to complete a short form to sign up for a focus group and give it back to the volunteer.
3. Based on information from sign-up forms, a focus group schedule was drawn up and child care was arranged. The Superior School District's parent involvement coordinator trained facilitators. Each person who completed a form was contacted to schedule a meeting time and asked to think about *The Big Question* before the meeting.
4. Eight different focus groups met. Members introduced themselves and viewed a realistic timeline of the years from their children's birth through high school graduation, more education, job or career choice, marriage, parenthood, and retirement. They reflected on their own life's experiences then got down to answering *The Big Question*.
5. A list of each group's desired "qualities, attributes, and abilities" for children was tallied. Many surprising similarities existed among groups! Focus group participants were especially encouraged to attend the all-school meeting, scheduled for April, which looked at how focus group results would be translated into budget priorities for the school year.

had been the practice in the past, I seriously doubt that the money would have been allotted in this same innovative way. Certainly, larger numbers of parents and staff would have been unhappy with the budget using a traditional, smaller-scale budget process.

Involving families and staff directly in budget decisionmaking creates ownership, not only of the process but also of the outcome. Even if a person does not agree with the end results, he or she has had an opportunity to take part in the process — to be heard, to come face-to-face with priorities, to hear other opinions and options, and to witness the final outcome. Bonds of trust were forged, and a deeper sense of respect evolved as parents and teachers voiced common concerns, expectations, hopes, and dreams for the children whose lives they share.

Hopefully, when we approach the budget for the 1997-98 school year, we will hearken to the valuable lessons of the year and process past. We will keep the vision and the priorities gleaned from it in our sight, re-examining them regularly to ensure that they remain true to the people and to the improvement of our children's learning.

We must guard against complacency by encouraging as many people as possible to be involved in the process, not only in tried-and-true ways but reaching out in new and innovative ways. We must ask our teachers, staff, and parents already involved to reach out personally to those who are not to forge stronger links in our partnership chain. And, we must never, ever waiver in our quest to improve education for all children. Only then can we hope to live happily ever after.

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School Enhancement Team Shapes Partnerships in Stevens Point

Ownership for family-community partnerships at McKinley Elementary School in Stevens Point belongs to the entire school community.

Parents and family members, teachers, support staff, school administrators, senior citizens, and other members of the community share in making decisions about what will be done and how it will be done.

The School Enhancement Team (SET) at McKinley Elementary, co-chaired by a parent and a teacher, is charged with deciding what focus partnerships at the school will take each year and developing plans to enact the focus. During the 1996-97 school year, for example, SET decided to upscale opportunities for senior citizens to participate in the school by offering intergenerational activities, themes, and events during the year.

"We already had senior citizens serving as volunteers and helping in classrooms, but team members decided they would like to see more seniors in the school building and that the school should offer them more opportunities to be here," Bob Helgert, SET co-chair and a second grade teacher at McKinley, said. As a result, McKinley has started after-school drama and chess clubs in which senior citizens participate and will host a Senior Folk Fair in May. The Folk Fair will offer seniors a chance to visit the school, be served and entertained by students, and discover what children are learning. It will also feature booths, historical exhibits, and other sources of information about services available in the community for senior citizens.

McKinley Principal John Blader calls the SET "a powerful device" and attributes much of the success of family-community partnerships at his school to the team's shared decisionmaking. "It's a lot of people coming together and trying to do things for kids," he said. "The ideas SET comes up with are not looked upon as 'John's ideas.' They come from a broader base, and they really meet the needs of our families."

As evidence of its ability to gain grassroots consensus, the Stevens Point School Board also regularly asks him if his SET team has approved proposals from McKinley School, Blader said.

About three years ago, a survey of McKinley's families showed that 65 percent of students come from families in which both parents work outside the home. Combined with an increasing number of students having difficulty in school, Blader recognized the need for the school to try harder at connecting with families. After attending a DPI Family-Community-School Partnership Workshop and learning how action teams can help schools meet families' and students' educational needs, Blader conceived the School Enhancement Team idea.

The team meets monthly on weekday mornings and offers a forum for families to air their concerns and ideas for improving learning at the school. "Our meetings have an open, vocal environment. People feel very free to offer their suggestions" about many topics, commented Sheryl Curtis, parent co-chair of the SET. About 25 school staff and parents attended the most recent meeting.

Curtis also acts as SET liaison to the school's Parent-Teacher Organization, which meets evenings. She has a permanent spot on the PTOs agenda, keeping both groups up-to-date about what the other is doing and about opportunities to collaborate. Although some PTO members at first regarded the SET with a bit of rivalry, Curtis said SET has established a niche of linking families to learning outside of fund-raising.

As a member of Wisconsin's Network of Partnership 2000 Schools, McKinley Elementary received a $2,500 grant to pay Curtis $2,000 for her efforts as parent coordinator this school year. Her duties include welcoming new families to the school, delivering informational materials to them, giving them a tour of the school, and arranging an established family in theneighborhood to act as a "mentor family" to ease their transition into the community.

SET has also been the source of other successful family-community programs at the school. The Nurturing Program, an eight-week support group,

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strengthens the abilities of at-risk families to parent and create learning-friendly environments at home. The school has also started a family center in its library, offering families resources and a place to meet.

Co-chair Helgert looks forward to involving the community in developing plans to celebrate Wisconsin's Sesquicentennial in 1998, a celebration in which senior citizens will play a special role. "They'll be able to give kids a real historical perspective of what school and life were like, a living history lesson."

Parent Coordinator/Liaison Job Description
McKinley Elementary School, Stevens Point

Position duties and responsibilities include:

Co-chair of School Enhancement Team (SET)
- coordinate and prepare discussion for monthly meetings
- coordinate Intergenerational Folk Fair set for May
- increase senior citizen involvement in schools by meeting with and planning for seniors to visit classrooms and help with reading and other activities
- attend PTO meetings and act as liaison between SET and PTO to facilitate communication and cooperation on joint projects.

Act as Parent Liaison
- maintain up-to-date records of new families joining McKinley School
- meet with new parents, provide information about school activities and organizations, and extend invitation to join.

Organize and maintain the School Family Resource Center, located in school library, available to all families and community members.
- gather reading material, video, and audio tapes
- arrange special meetings and guest speakers on a regular basis
- inform all parents, through school newsletter, about "parent information sessions" at the Family Center

Participate in charter school grant proposal writing and planning
- attend meetings, brainstorm ideas, and offer parent perspectives
- bring ideas and concerns of parents to the grant-writing process

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Healthy Communities, Families Generate Healthy Youth

Picture two communities in the Midwest. Both are relatively small. Both have similar demographic and economic profiles. From a distance, these two communities seem remarkably alike, but upon closer examination, some startling differences emerge.

Nearly half of the youth in one community engage in risky behaviors, such as heavy alcohol or other drug use, sexual activity, attempted suicide, and delinquent behaviors. In the other, 9 percent do.

What's the difference between the two communities? What, if anything, happens in the second community that deters risky behavior? How can other communities learn from these two examples?

Findings from The Search Institute show that healthy communities are distinguished by their ability to provide and involve young people in meaningful experiences, such as religious services, school or community sports, music, and other structured activities. A healthy community benefits *all* youth. In healthy communities where positive influences are accessible to all, however, vulnerable youth especially benefit from the healthier youth and the larger community around them.

Families can help

- instill healthy behaviors in their own children, including encouraging their involvement in school and community activities.
- take responsibility for the well-being of all children in the community.
- support and participate in community activities and institutions that affect youth, such as the schools, churches, and organizations that directly serve and involve youth.

Schools can help

- offering a diverse array of activities for youth.
- identify the unique needs and strengths of your students through surveys.
- working with other organizations to jointly sponsor youth activities or offer students information about opportunities.
- increase service-learning opportunities for youth with the community.
- re-orient athletic, music, and other programs so there is maximum participation.
- encourage youth to assume meaningful roles in decisionmaking at all levels in the school.
- coordinate community groups and task forces for youth.

Youth can help

- push for opportunities to take on meaningful roles that help shape school and community activities for youth.
- identify needs and create opportunities to help serve others in the community.
- ask an adult for help in meeting a personal or group goal.

Local government, business, and religious organizations can help

- sponsor diverse social and service activities for youth.
- develop partnerships with other community groups working for youth.
- make facilities and resources available whenever possible to help youth.
- give parents and other family members time to attend functions and to strengthen community youth groups by participating as coaches, mentors, and organizers.

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What are the personal assets that protect youth from risky behaviors? Do your family and community make it possible for youth to equip themselves with these assets?

Category	Personal Asset
Support	1. Family support 2. Parent(s) as social resource 3. Parent communication 4. Other adult resources 5. Other adult communication 6. Parent involvement in schooling 7. Positive school climate
Control	8. Parental standards 9. Parental discipline 10. Parental monitoring 11. Time at home 12. Positive peer influence
Structured time use	13. Involved in music 14. Involved in school extracurricular activities 15. Involved in community groups or activities 16. Involved in church or synagogue
Educational commitment	17. Achievement motivation 18. Educational aspiration 19. School performance 20. Homework
Positive Values	21. Values helping people 22. Concerned about world hunger 23. Cares about people's feelings 24. Values sexual restraint
Social competence	25. Assertiveness skills 26. Decisionmaking skills 27. Friendship-making skills 28. Planning skills 29. Self esteem 30. Positive view of personal future

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Community Health Checklist

How strong is your community in providing a healthy environment for young people? Use this checklist to rate strengths of your community. Mark those characteristics that are strong, then compare and discuss your perceptions together and decide what you can do make your community a better place for teenagers.

Parent's Perceptions	Teen's Perceptions	Community Strengths
		How Families Can Contribute
____	____	Most young people in the community experience positive and supportive family life.
____	____	Most young people have positive relationships and communicate well with their parents.
____	____	Most parents in the community monitor teenagers' activities, express concern, and provide discipline.
		How School Can Contribute
____	____	Teachers care about and encourage students.
____	____	Students try hard in school, care about school, and want to continue their education beyond high school.
____	____	Students receive support and involvement from parents in school-related activities.
		How Community Organizations Can Contribute
____	____	Churches and synagogues offer programs that actively involve young people in their services.
____	____	Extracurricular activities and community youth organizations involve most teenagers in some structured, planned activities at least two hours every week.
____	____	Adults (other than parents) are available to young people for serious conversations on important issues (for example, through programs such as mentoring).
		How Teenagers Can Contribute
____	____	Most teenagers avoid risky behavior, such as skipping school, drinking alcohol frequently, using other drugs, or attending drinking parties.
____	____	Most teenagers don't place excessive emphasis on having lots of money, having lots of fun, or being popular.
____	____	Most young people spend time volunteering to help others.
____	____	Most teenagers think it's important to help other people, reduce hunger and poverty, and make the world a better place to live.
____	____	Most young people have responsible values, such as valuing sexual abstinence, not drinking and driving, and not riding with drunk drivers.

The more of these strengths that are present in a community, the healthier a community will be for young people. Give special emphasis to teens' ratings, since their perceptions are what guide their behaviors.

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Family and Community Town Suppers:

A Great Way Schools Can Address Meaty Issues

Schools looking for a way to bring meaning and learning to an issue facing their community may want to consider hosting a Family and Community Town Supper. The supper brings families and community members together around a central question of importance to young people and adults, who listen to a panel, discuss and weigh the issues while they eat a meal, and usually vote on the question.

Young people attending the town supper learn about the democratic process in resolving issues, community members learn what their neighbors think about the issue, and parents, many times, are surprised about the depth and gravity of their children's opinions, said Eileen Briggs-Houle, Outreach Specialist at the Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources. The Clearinghouse helps schools and communities plan town suppers.

The town suppers began as a brainchild of Carol Lobes, Clearinghouse director, and Lynn McDonald, a family therapist in Madison, as an innovative way to promote community discussions on important issues and, consequently, to develop partnerships to work on those issues. Approximately 12 town suppers have been held in communities statewide, including:

- Madison West High School, where three town suppers have addressed questions about lowering the legal drinking age, changing the electoral college system, and legalizing marijuana.
- McFarland High School, where the community began plans to build a youth center after addressing complaints at the town supper that there was not enough for young people to do.
- LaCrosse County, where students from four middle schools addressed issues surrounding the impact of tobacco advertising on youth.
- Stoughton, where high school students presented a skit on the issue of where to build a rehabilitation house for alcoholic teens.

The town suppers take about $200 to organize and require a minimum of about six weeks of planning, Houle-Briggs said. The key to a successful event is to involve young people in the planning "from day 1," she added. For example, young people can vote on what issue will be addressed and how the issue will be researched, what the format of the evening will be, and how the event will be promoted. The participation of students is critical to cultivating their sense of ownership in the project. Attendance is usually targeted for about 80 to 120 people of all ages.

In LaCrosse, for example, 6th grade students wrote and conducted a survey of classmates about their use of tobacco products, interviewed retail store owners about how and why they sold cigarettes, and made their photographs of local tobacco advertising into a slide presentation for the evening. The group unanimously voted that the tobacco industry should be regulated to prevent targeting and selling to minors and came up with a list of actions individuals could take to realize this goal.

"It was a wonderful way to get both parents and students motivated and to realize that each person can make a difference. That it's not good to just sit back and take an attitude of 'I shouldn't get involved because I can't do anything about it anyway,' " said CESA 4 staff member Brian Weaver, who helped organize the evening.

About 85 people met for a catered meal in a local church's community room, charging $2.50 for adults and $1.50 for children to offset meal costs. Several community groups co-sponsored the event to help defray costs and helped publicize the event.

The only expenses associated with holding a town supper are usually the meal, some publicity, and rental of a public announcement system, Briggs-Houle said. Most town suppers are held in a restaurant or other public place, last two to three hours, and are organized by a small team of six to 10 students and adults. The format of the evening generally consists of:

1. Students and a school representative welcome participants.
2. A moderator at each table invites families to eat

together while discussing the issue. Everyone at the table has a chance to express an opinion.

3. Background is presented on the question being discussed, usually with a panel of experts and a short talk or presentation of some kind.

4. A vote from the whole group can be taken, and/or a spokesperson from each table can talk briefly about the consensus of the table.

5. The group talks about what steps to take next to resolve or promote the issue.

"It's a good tool to teach young people that they belong, that they have a voice in their communities, and that adults want and need to hear their voices, too," she added.

The DPI, in conjunction with the Wisconsin Clearinghouse, is making available small grants to schools and communities interested in discussing citizenship issues and developing a set of values that reflect community priorities.

For more information about holding a town supper, please call Eileen Briggs-Houle at the Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources, (608) 262-9158.

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Effective Practices: Focus on Volunteering

by Jane Grinde, Team Leader
DPI Bright Beginnings and Family-Community-School Partnerships

Definition: Volunteer not only means those who come to school during the day but also those who support school goals and children's learning in any way, at any place, and at any time.

The value of volunteers in the schools goes beyond the extra hands available to help cut out trees for the bulletin board, listen to a child practice multiplication facts, or raise money for computer software. The greater value is working toward the common goals of the school community and gaining the sense of belonging to a learning community.

The end of the school year is a good time not only to recognize the individuals who volunteered but also to conduct an evaluation and to consider developing a family and community participation policy.

When asked at the beginning of the school year, most parents indicate an interest in volunteering, but by the end of the school year, how many parents actually volunteered? How many parents felt welcome in the school building? How many were contacted at least once to get involved with a project? How many were given realistic opportunities to contribute? How many of those who volunteered felt they were doing something worthwhile? If a parent said no to one request, was the parent asked again? Were the opportunities offered at different times of the day and both at home and at school?

These are the kinds of questions worth asking as school staff evaluate their volunteer programs. Many parents say they have indicated they are willing to help, but no one calls them. They say they want to use their talents to help. They want guidelines for volunteering, and training, if necessary. Most parents want to help, but too often by the end of the school year in too many schools, not nearly enough parents participated in projects. A sample survey for parents to complete follows this article. The survey may help schools evaluate their volunteer efforts.

Volunteering is one type of participation recommended in the framework for participation. According to Joyce Epstein, director of the Center on Family, School and Community Partnerships, schools have a responsibility to improve volunteer recruitment, training, work, and schedules involving families because they support students and school programs.

Volunteering can be done in the school or classroom, for the school or classroom, or even as an audience member attending student performances and sports events, recognition and award ceremonies, and celebrations.

Epstein recommends several practices to promote the use of volunteers, including:

- An annual survey to identify interests, talents, and availability of volunteers.
- A parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, and resources for families.
- Classroom parents, a telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information.
- Parent patrols to increase school safety.
- An annual review of schedules for student performances, games, and assemblies for daytime and evening audiences.

One of the biggest challenges to a volunteer program is coordination and accountability. Someone needs to be responsible for the program, preferably someone paid to do the job. The volunteer coordinator's duties include:

- Recruiting widely for volunteers so all families know that their time and talents are welcome.
- Making flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable working parents to participate.
- Providing training for volunteers and matching time and talents with school needs.

The school's action team for partnerships (see article in this packet on action teams) should consider what results it wants for its volunteer program. Epstein identifies results for students, teachers, and parents:

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Results for students

- skills in communicating with adults
- improved skills that are tutored or taught by volunteers
- awareness of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parents and other volunteers

Results for parents

- understanding teacher's job
- conduct of school activities at home
- self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children
- awareness that families are welcome and valued at school
- gains in specific skills of volunteer work
- enrollment in programs to improve own education

Results for teachers

- effective organization, training, and use of volunteers
- readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school
- awareness of parents' talents and interests in school and children
- greater individual attention to students because of help from volunteers

The Department of Public Instruction has limited supplies available of a school volunteer resource guide, "Light the Way for Children." The guide includes sample surveys and policies.

Volunteerism a National Focus

Volunteerism received renewed attention in Spring 1997 during "The President's Summit for America's Future," aimed at bringing America to a new level of commitment to volunteer service, especially targeting the nation's young people. The summit established five goals for increasing fundamental resources for children and youth:

1. **To create additional opportunities to have an ongoing relationship with a caring adult–mentor, tutor, or coach.** While there are currently hundreds of thousands of mentoring and tutoring relationships, an estimated 15 million young people would benefit from the intervention of a caring adult.
2. **To increase safe places and structured activities during non-school hours** so young people can study, play, and receive the necessary guidance to reach their full potential in life. Young people cannot flourish, develop, and properly mature into productive citizens in a climate of fear and chaos.
3. **To forge new partnerships among businesses, schools, and citizen volunteers** to provide more young people with mentors, summer jobs, internships, and the essential skills of reading and mathematics. Many young people attend school with little or no concept of how their studies will prepare them for a job or economic opportunity.
4. **To find new ways to assure every child a healthy start,** in cooperation with government, health care providers, and business. Adequate health care and healthy behaviors are essential to every child's development and well-being.
5. **To provide young people with the opportunity to engage in community service** so they become part of the solution and experience firsthand the benefit of being active citizens.

For more information on the President's Summit for America's Future, call 1-800-365-0153 or check out the Web page at www.citizenservice.org/

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Sample Survey of Parents on Volunteering

Dear School Family:

Our school is working to improve ways that school and families can help each other and help all children succeed in school. One of the wonderful things about our school is the opportunity to participate in the school community and get to know other families. We recognize that parents and other adult family members contribute in many different ways to the success of their children's learning, and there is no one right or best way to do that.

Because schools and children do better when families are involved, and because the school staff can't do it by themselves, a committee of your parent association is seeking ways to help all families participate more fully in their children's learning. The committee is focusing first on the importance of **volunteering**.

At our first meeting, we decided we needed to learn more about

- Who volunteers and why.
- What types of volunteer activities people are doing.
- What needs the school has for volunteers.
- What other schools in the area do to encourage, or even require, participation by parents.

Our goal is to recommend a family participation policy that is respectful of families, staff, and students and results in an improved learning community.

Please take a few minutes to complete the following survey. Since we value the opinions of all families, we plan to follow up with a phone call if we don't hear from you in two weeks.

Sincerely,
Family Participation Committee (include names and telephone numbers)

Survey

1. What types of volunteering have you done this past year? Circle as many as apply. Add others you can think of that aren't listed.

lunchroom duty playground duty chaperoning a field trip organizing an event

working in the library working with children (tutoring, listening to children read, etc.)

serving as an officer in the parent association clerical work working at home

List others:

2. Approximately how many hours of volunteering have you done this school year?

_____

3. Did you fill out the volunteer request form at the beginning of the school year?

_____ Yes If yes, were you contacted by someone?
_____ No If no, why not?

4. Have there been times when you volunteered and no one called you?

_____ Yes If yes, for what?
_____ No

5. Were there times when you volunteered and did not feel welcome?

_____ Yes _____ No

Comments:

6. Were there times when you volunteered when you felt it wasn't worthwhile, either for you, the students, or staff?

_____ Yes What was it?
_____ No

7. Are there volunteer activities you would like to do but haven't had the opportunity to do so?

_____ Yes If yes, what would you like to do?
_____ No

8. Would you feel comfortable suggesting a volunteer activity you would like to do rather than waiting to be asked?

_____ Yes _____ No

9. Do you favor *requiring* participation in at least one fund-raiser?

_____ Yes What do you suggest?
_____ No

10. Would you favor a requirement that every family volunteer a certain number of hours to the school?

_____ Yes Suggestions?
_____ No

Other comments or suggestions:

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Whitewater Businesses Participate in School Volunteering

by Sharon McCullough
Community Education Director
Whitewater School District

"Many schools are like little islands set apart from the mainland of life by a deep moat of convention and tradition. Across this moat there is a drawbridge, which is lowered at certain periods of the day in order that the part-time inhabitants may cross over to the island in the morning and back to the mainland at night. Why do these young people go out to the island? They go there in order to learn how to live on the mainland."

— William G. Carr, 1942

Throughout Wisconsin and the United States, community involvement in the schools is being recognized as a tool for major educational reform. And as public schools are expected to provide much more than the ABC's, the drawbridge to the community becomes increasingly important. The Whitewater Unified School District initiated a community/school volunteer program to build lasting bridges of support and involvement in schools.

The Whitewater School District has long recognized that volunteer programs can reinforce the efforts of teachers, enrich the educational opportunities of children, and supplement the curriculum by making available the talents and resources of the community. A community volunteer program will also help to broaden community understanding of school needs and goals while promoting school-community relations.

At the start of the 1996-97 school year, local businesses in Whitewater became directly involved in a school volunteer-business partnership. Volunteers help deliver services, and building volunteer coordinators match requests and personnel. Local businesses are involved in two ways:

Businesses sponsor or co-sponsor the hiring of one volunteer building coordinator. The sponsorship comes in the form of a stipend paid to coordinators to match requests for volunteers with human resources, recruit and assign volunteers, keep files of volunteer activities within the school, make good use of volunteers, and arrange for their recognition.

The school district also encourages businesses to allow their employees to join the "Hour-A-Month Club" and volunteer one hour of work time a month to participate in a school volunteer program. The employer decides whether to pay the employee for the hour off. Students benefit from having caring adults as resources in reading, math, art, music, physical education, and related subjects or who work with students with exceptional needs. Volunteers also act as resources for occupations, hobbies, and special interests.

Currently, Whitewater has four local businesses participating as stipend sponsors and seven businesses involved with the Hour-A-Month Club. More than 2,000 volunteer hours have been logged in two of the district's elementary schools that participate in this program and other volunteer programs in the Whitewater School District.

Following, are some steps districts can use to organize and implement a business-sponsored community/school volunteer program:

Step 1

Identify which school(s) in your district may be interested in establishing a volunteer program at their building. Discuss with the building principal and/or members of the building leadership team which candidate(s) may be qualified to act as building volunteer coordinator. Interview candidates and select a coordinator. Decide how much the stipend will be. Set up a work space at the school for the coordinator, including a telephone and answering machine. Personal business cards will be a real boon to each coordinator.

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Step 2

Provide adequate training in the areas of policymaking and management of volunteers. The Knowledge Transfer, 39232 Cielo Place, Fullerton, CA 92635, (714) 525-5469, is one example of a company that offers these workshops throughout the country. Next, develop appropriate procedures for using volunteers in the schools and a volunteer handbook to help each volunteer become familiar with those policies and procedures. Be sure to have a volunteer recognition program in the works, too.

Step 3

Write to local businesses explaining the mission of your volunteer program and invite them to become involved. Sponsorships are tax-deductible. Use Whitewater's levels of sponsorship: $1,000, $500, $250, or whatever levels feel most comfortable. Enclose a pledge form and a checklist of areas the businesses might be interested in participating. Inform the businesses that you'll be contacting them soon to find out their level of interest. Then do it!

Step 4

Launch a publicity campaign to inform members of the business community about the program, especially through the local Chamber of Commerce or civic groups. Acknowledge the businesses that have agreed to take part in the program and include photographs of the participating individuals if possible.

Step 5

Ask teachers and other staff how they might be able to use a volunteer inside or out of school. Place a request box in the school office where staff can leave messages spelling out their needs for community volunteers. The building coordinator should check this box frequently and match requests with volunteers whenever possible.

Step 6

Ask volunteers to sign in at the office when coming to volunteer. Before or during their initial visit, the volunteer coordinator should complete an emergency information sheet and service commitment. Buttons given out at sign-in can help identify volunteers in the school building.

Everyone can be a volunteer, and everyone's contributions count! Wherever they are and whatever they do, volunteers will make our schools a better place to live.

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A Lifelong Gift to Children: Fathers Involved in Learning

by Randall L. Glysch
Ph.D. Program, Department of Child and Family Studies,
University of Wisconsin-Madison

The best gift a father can offer his children is himself; in other words, to be available and accessible. Fathers who frequently let their children know that school is a priority and who spend time monitoring and being involved with their children's school progress will be giving children lasting messages about the importance of learning.

Involved fathers influence their children's development and school success in a way that promotes happy, confident individuals. Children learn valuable life skills and positive behavior from supportive fathers that they remember and emulate long after reaching adulthood.

Research has shown that children with involved fathers generally experience more school success and do better academically than children whose fathers are not involved. The importance of father involvement in helping children succeed in both school and life cannot be overstated.

Here are a few ideas about what fathers can do to help promote their children's learning:

- **Talk to your children** and take an interest in what they are doing in school. Praise them when they do well on classroom assignments and projects. Ask them specific questions about what they learned at school during the day. For example, try asking, "What letters are you practicing in kindergarten?" or "Did you like studying the pioneers in social studies this week?" instead of "What did you do in school today?"
- **Play with your child.** Whether you enjoy fixing the car, tossing a ball, constructing with Tinkertoys, or checking out the Internet, your child learns from you. Play is child's work. What better way to create great childhood memories than to do things together that you both enjoy?
- **Communicate** and work with your child's teacher. Don't hesitate to pick up the phone and talk or write notes to your child's teacher about ideas for helping your child learn at home.
- **Volunteer.** Most teachers are thrilled to have fathers volunteer in their child's classroom or on school trips or projects. Do you have a hobby or career that children may want to learn about? Children know that learning is important when they see fathers taking the time to help at school.
- **Read!** Read to and with your child and, just as importantly, read yourself. Show your children interesting pictures in the newspaper and read aloud funny stories or interesting items that you come across. Children need to get the message from their fathers— not just mom — that reading is an interesting, valuable way to spend time.
- **Visit the library together.** Pick out books that you both like, bring them home, and read them together. Talk about what you are reading and look up the answers to questions, at home or in the library, together.
- **Emphasize the importance of academics.** Take time to explain to your child how what you learned in school helps you as an adult, either in your job or in everyday life.
- **Support your school's rules and goals.** Most schools send home handouts, newsletters, or a parents' handbook that outlines basic rules, procedures, and learning goals. It's good to familiarize yourself with them and try to set up some basic expectations for your child's conduct, safety, and responsibility both at home and at school.
- **Be a voice for fathers and parents** in your school. If possible, commit time to serving on a school committee, council, or PTA to represent the perspective of parents. Your experiences and commitment as a father means that you have a unique and valuable contribution to make at the school level. Your voice will ensure that decisions made about school policies, plans, and textbooks reflect the interests of parents in their children's learning.
- **Be a link to the community** for your child and school. Do you know individuals, civic groups, or businesses in your community that would provide

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resources or information to supplement your child's learning? Learning happens everywhere, not only in the classroom.

• **Keep learning.** Remember, parenting is a skill that has to be learned like any other skill. Take advantage of workshops or presentations that your school or community offers to help parents address tough issues about child development, discipline, alcohol and drug abuse prevention, and learning. There's no such thing as a "perfect parent," only loving parents who are willing to keep trying and keep learning to help their children.

A father and child activity:

Create Your Own Family Stories

Here is a simple activity fathers and children can do together to nurture learning as well as their own special relationship. Creating and telling family stories helps children realize that stories come from real people and are about real events. Children love hearing stories about themselves, and family stories will give children a sense of their own special place in history.

Here's what to do to create your own Family Stories:

• Tell your child stories about your parents and grandparents — where they came from, how they grew up, what their homes were like, what they did in their spare time, how they celebrated holidays, or unusual things that happened to them. You might even put these stories in a book and add old family photographs.

• Ask your child to tell you stories about what happened on special days such as birthdays, family vacations, and holidays.

• Reminisce about when you were a little boy. What are your happiest memories? What struggles did you have? How did you cope with them? Talk about your brothers and sisters, things that happened at school and on summer vacations. Who was your favorite teacher? Why? What did you like least about school?

• Create a new family story. Write a trip journal with your child. Recording special events and pasting photographs into a journal ties the family story to a written record connecting the past, present, and future. Or, make everyday events special by writing about those that you enjoy doing together, such as trips to the market, library, park, or school.

Whether we always want to be or not, we are examples to children about how life should be lived. When fathers and children do things together, learning becomes fun and important.

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16 Questions to Encourage Critical Thinking in Young Readers

A good way to prompt your child to think critically about what he is reading is by asking him open-ended questions that require a thoughtful response. There are no "right or wrong" answers, but the following questions encourage a variety of responses and are some of the highest-level questions that parents can ask children while reading with them. They oblige children to think about the story and their own experiences before answering. Share your own insights and experiences, too!

1. Look at the cover illustrations, read the title, or read a short excerpt. Ask, "What do you think might happen in this story?" Read further. Ask, "What do you think might happen next? Why do you think that?"
2. What did you notice in this story?
3. What part did you like best? Why?
4. Did this story remind you of anything you have done or seen?
5. Did the story end the way you thought it would? What were the clues that helped you figure it out?
6. Is this story like any other story you have read or watched? How?
7. What questions would you ask if the author were here? How do you think the author would answer them?
8. Did you wonder about anything in this story?
9. What would you have done if you were (a story character)?
10. Was there anything about what we read that surprised you?
11. Why do you think the title of this book is (name title)?
12. Who is the main character in this story? What kind of person is she? How do you know?
13. What character in the book are you most like? Explain.
14. What would you change in the story if you were the author?
15. Would you have acted differently if you were (character)?
16. Think of a different ending to the story. How would the rest of the story have to be changed to fit the new ending?

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Paired Reading: It's simple and it works!

Reading studies show that paired reading, in which adult and child alternately read aloud passages simultaneously and alone, helps young readers improve their comprehension, word accuracy, and attitude about reading. Paired reading also allows less able readers to move from supportive reading wit a parent to independent reading over a relatively short period of time.

Here's how to start:

1. Let the child choose the book he would like to read with you.

2. Decide on a nonverbal signal, such as a tap, nudge, or squeeze, your child will use to indicate that she would like to continue reading aloud alone.

3. Begin the book by both reading aloud together at the same time. Adjust your speed to match your child's speed. Don't read faster or slower than your child.

4. When your child feels confident enough to continue reading the text independently, he gives you the previously-agreed-upon nonverbal signal to indicate his desire to read aloud alone.

5. Praise your child for the solo reading effort and continue to provide quiet support as she reads aloud alone until she makes an error, such as a word susbstitution, omission, or mispronunciation. Wait four seconds to see if your child is able to correct herself.

6. If your child is unable to correct his mistake, point to and read the word aloud. Continue reading aloud with the child until he once again gives you the nonverbal signal to read aloud alone.

Feel free to stop and discuss any interesting or confusing events, ideas, or characters in your reading whenever you like. Relating the story to everyday experiences or to life's experiences is important.

In five to 10 weeks of practicing this technique five times a week for five to 10 minutes a session, you'll be able to see your child triple her progress in reading accuracy and reading comprehension.

Adapted from San Diego City Schools' Teacher Tools #4, Parent Involvement and Support: Helping Teachers Help Parents Help Students.

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For Families: Ways to Help Your Child with Summer Reading

Summertime is reading time! Those lazy, too-hot-for-anything-else days are wonderful opportunities for children to hone reading skills they learned at school or to catch up on books they might have come across during the busy school year.

Whether you work at home or outside of the home, take a few minutes to visit the library with your child, sign up for the Summer Library Program, and stock up on some good summertime reading. Following are some tips for helping your child cross those "bridges" to lifelong reading and critical thinking skills.

Setting the Scene for Reading

Whether it's in the library, her bedroom, or on a blanket under a tree, help your child find a comfortable, quiet place to read.

- Orient your child to the book by looking at the cover first and talking about what you think the story may be about. Ask your child what she thinks.
- Read aloud to your child and with your child.
- Discuss the stories you read together and if they remind you of your life in any way.
- Recognize the value of silent reading.
- Let your child see you reading books, magazines, newspapers. You are your child's reading model.

Helping Your Child Learn New Words

When your child comes to a word that is difficult for him to read, wait five to 10 seconds to see what he will do to help himself. In addition to asking your child to "sound out" new or unfamiliar words he struggles to read, you can also ask him one or more of the following questions:

- What would make sense there?
- What do you think that word would be?
- Use the picture to help you figure out what it could be. Go back to the beginning and try that again.
- Skip over it and read to the end of the sentence. Now what do you think it could be?
- You read that word on another page. See if you can find it.

Finally, you can help your child sound out the word or you can tell him the word.

Encouraging Your Child's Reading Strengths

Most importantly, focus on what your child is doing well and attempting to do. When your child is having difficulty and trying to work out the trouble spots, remain loving and supportive with comments such as:

- Good for you. I like the way you tried to work that out.
- That was a good try. Yes, that word would make sense there.
- I like the way you looked at the picture to help yourself.
- I like the way you went back to the beginning of the sentence and tried it again. That's what good readers do.
- You are becoming a good reader. I'm proud of you!

Remember, it takes just a few minutes a day to keep reading skills moving ahead and to give your child a lifetime of learning and enjoyment. Best of all, it's time that you spend together!

Adapted from Teacher Tools #4, Everyone's a Reader!, published by San Diego City Schools, Parent Involvement and Support Unit.

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Wisconsin Libraries Make Communities a Learning Place

Following is a sampling of how seven Wisconsin public libraries receiving Library Services and Construction Act grants in 1996-97 are reaching out to improve literacy in their respective communities. Many of the libraries work directly with the public schools, families, child care providers, and other community groups. The focus of the grant was to help increase reading in families who may not regularly bring their children to the library. For more information about the grants, please call Frances de Usabel at DPI, 608-266-0419.

Beloit's Reading Road Show

Almost one-third of Beloit's children live in poverty. The Beloit Public Library's Reading Road Show is a before or after-school program that brings paperback book collections and "Bookleggers" to elementary school students in six community outreach sites. Bookleggers are adult volunteers from the community who present book talks to all third grade classrooms in Beloit public schools each month for seven months. Students can check out in their classrooms multiple copies of each title presented.
Project Administrator: Kate FitzGerald, 608-364-2909

Madison: Building Bridges between Libraries and Head Start

Madison Public Library youth services staff will hold two "Library Parties" at each of the city's Head Start centers. Stories, songs, and activities on a popular storytime theme presented at each "party" will promote reading readiness for preschoolers and model storytime techniques for Head Start staff.

Head Start teachers will also receive "Teacher Party Packets" which include bibliographies and suggestions for selecting stories. In addition, two monthly inservice sessions for Head Start teachers will be devoted to identifying interesting materials that Head Start teachers can use in their programs.

Parents of Head Start youth will be encouraged to read to their children and receive read-aloud tips at two Head Start parent meetings, and each Head Start classroom will be given a collection of their own books to use.
Project Coordinator: Linda Olson, 608-266-6345

Menominee Tribal-County Library creates a Reading-Study Center

School-aged children in the Menominee Tribe's South Branch Community live some distance from the tribe's main library in Keshena and may not have the opportunity to visit the main library frequently. The tribal-county library will try to remedy that obstacle by creating a Reading-Study Center in the South Branch community.

Library furniture and equipment will be purchased, and a collection will be built consisting primarily of reference materials for students. The center will also be linked by computer to an on-line catalog in Keshena, which will provide a rotating collection of more popular reading materials.

A tutor aide will be hired to provide programs to enhance children's reading and study skills, including creating an after-school tutoring program, a summer reading program, and an intergenerational program that recruits tribal elders as storytellers with Head Start children. The center will also provide transportation for South Branch children to make regular trips to the main library.
Project Coordinator: Sally Kitson, 715-799-5212

Brown County Babies are "Born to Read"

The "Born to Read" project encourages teen mothers and low-income and non-English-speaking families to read to their infants and to use the public library. Brown County children's librarians will visit newbaby classes at various community centers, and area hospitals will distribute information about local libraries and about the importance of reading to babies and young children to all parents of infants.

The project is also conducting a public relations campaign in Brown County. The "Born to Read" mes-

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sage appears in three languages — English, Spanish, and Hmong — on buses and billboards, in community agencies, and on television via a commercial produced by WBAY-TV. Collections of board books for babies and other library information will be placed at several shelters and community agencies, and children's librarians will receive training and will offer regular storytimes for infants at the Brown County Central Library and six branch libraries.
Project Administrator: Lee Bock, 414-448-4351

Platteville's Families and Libraries Workshop Series

A Families and Libraries Work Group, whose members represent local and regional public libraries, Even Start, Head Start, and Southwest Wisconsin Technical College, is aiming to make the library a learning place for parents and children. The workgroup is developing six thematic workshops to be presented monthly that will encourage family literacy and library usage by families and offer families ideas for learning activities at home and in the library. Materials for at-risk families and those with special needs will be included. Community-wide publicity will spread word about these efforts.
Project Coordinator: John Patane, 608-348-7441

Eagle River: Reading for the Future

The Olson Memorial Library in Eagle River are creating theme kits for checkout to child care centers, story hour groups, special needs classes, early learning groups, and families. The library is also responding to the literacy needs of older children and adults by purchasing easy-reading materials for them, updating its GED materials, and adding large-print books for visually-impaired elementary and middle school children. The local literacy council will also be housed at the library.
Project Administrator: Diana Anderson, 715-479-8070

Beaver Dam Library Supports Children At-Risk

The Beaver Dam Community Library will bolster the Beaver Dam School District's efforts to academically support young learners at-risk of school failure. The school district's Partners in Learning Program uses community volunteers to provide academic support to at-risk children in Kindergarten through Grade 3. The library will create a reading/learning center at four tutoring sites in the schools, offer children and their families weekend and evening use of reading motivation computer programs in the library.
Project Administrator: Sue Mevis, 414-887-4631